United Nations A/AC.253/11

General Assembly

Distr.: General
21 May 1999
English
Original: Spanish

Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives
First session
17–28 May 1999
Agenda item 3
Preliminary review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development

Note verbale dated 20 May 1999 from the Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit herewith copies, in English and in French, of the report of the second tripartite meeting on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, endorsed by the Inter-Parliamentary Council in Brussels on 16 April 1999.

The Permanent Mission of Spain to the United Nations would be grateful if this report could be circulated as a document of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives.

99-15189 (E) 250599

Annex

[Original: English and French]

REPORT OF THE SECOND TRI-PARTITE MEETING ON FOLLOW-UP OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
New York, 31 March 1999

Endorsed by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 164th session
(Brussels, 16 April 1999)

The present report contains a summary of the discussion that took place at the IInd Tri-Partite Meeting of Representatives of Parliaments, Governments and Inter-Governmental Organisations. The meeting took place at UN Headquarters on 30 and 31 March 1999 and was organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in co-operation with the UN Division for Social Policy and Development and the United Nations Development Programme. The participants in the meeting – who took part in a personal capacity – are listed in appendix I of this report.

To prepare for the meeting, the IPU conducted a survey of parliamentary action taken to implement the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), seeking to identify possible constraints and proposals for future action. The survey was compiled with the assistance of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and was discussed by IPU's Committee for Sustainable Development in early March 1999. The Committee's report, together with the survey, was submitted to the Tri-Partite Meeting and formed the basis for its discussions on parliamentary action to follow up the WSSD. It is included as appendix II of this report.

The meeting also discussed new initiatives in which it also drew inspiration from the draft text (document E/CN.5/1999/L.8) submitted to the Commission for Social Development by its Bureau at the end of its 37th session in February 1999.

Finally, the meeting also considered some further measures which Parliaments could take in support of the WSSD at the national and international level.

1. Parliamentary action taken since the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD)

The discussions clearly demonstrated that national Parliaments had a considerable role to play in the follow-up to the WSSD. Action by Parliament and its Members is crucial for the implementation of social development policies and programmes. Parliament provides the legislative framework for social development and allocates financial resources. It can also influence and prompt action towards achieving the goals set at the WSSD and monitor their implementation. Moreover, it is instrumental in relaying and explaining to the public the issues involved and in forging popular support for action to implement social policies. Public awareness of social development issues and public discussion and promotion of policies to address them are prerequisites for problem-solving. Through direct and continuous dialogue with their constituents, members of Parliament are well placed to create awareness and foster discussion.

In light of the report of the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development and the survey carried out by the IPU, the meeting was pleased to note that Parliaments have been playing an active role in seeking to implement the WSSD Declaration and Programme of Action. Parliamentary action has helped to bring about dialogue on social development in the national context, and has popularised the various concepts and goals on which the WSSD was based. Parliaments have enacted legislation on many critical social questions. They have frequently made pledges in the field of social spending, designated focal institutions to oversee the implementation process, observed specific events and engaged in wider interaction with NGOs, welfare institutions and a host of other institutions of civil society and a few have also sought to define and interpret the Declaration and Programme of Action in their national context.

Nevertheless, the meeting also noted that on the whole, there was a lack of progress in implementing the Summit's commitments. This was especially noticeable in the failure of many countries, including the industrialised countries, to develop detailed, national strategies for addressing poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. There has also been a failure to meet international commitments agreed at the WSSD. National Parliaments have played an important role in focusing government efforts on elaborating long-term national development strategies. Targeting of the goals set at the WSSD in a more systematic manner, with corresponding allocation of resources, has occurred in only a minority of countries. Indeed, most countries report few or no tangible results in terms of reducing poverty, increasing productive employment and eliminating social exclusion.

The meeting acknowledged however that a period of four years since the Social Summit was insufficient to evaluate properly the effectiveness of policy measures. Furthermore, there have been formidable difficulties in implementing the Summit's Commitments at the national level. In developing countries, in particular, where poverty, unemployment and economic marginalisation are most acute, the State is often unable to provide comprehensive basic social services. At a time when economic liberalisation and rapid integration into the global economy have frequently implied impoverishment of a growing number of people and rising inequalities, these same processes have reduced both Government's autonomy and its capacity to plan social provisioning programmes. As a result, social problems have multiplied and in some cases have become too complex to be handled by individual countries on their own. In formerly socialist transitional countries, on the other hand, changes in the economy have resulted in weakened social security measures. Unemployment has grown, while health care, pensions and social insurance have shrunk. Income inequalities have also increased. The meeting thought that special attention needed to be paid to these regions' problems.

2. Prospects for further action

A number of suggestions were made regarding issues that had to be addressed as a matter of priority. Globalisation had both positive and negative effects on social development. It is important to address how the social agenda can be implemented in the context of market-driven economic policies. It was strongly suggested that Governments and Parliaments address the potential conflict between social development and the market and seek to reconcile social and economic policies at both national and international levels. The long term progress of developing countries with a view to their greater integration into the process of globalisation to increase their ability to compete in the international economic environment needs to be addressed urgently. New partnerships involving governments, parliaments, business, civil society and international economic fora need to be explored.

The issue of protecting vulnerable groups from the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes was considered to be especially crucial. The point was made that although good macro-economic management matters, there is a need to balance economic policy with a longer-term social agenda. This needed to go together with the cancellation of debt, possibly in the form of debt-swapping for social development. The meeting also reiterated the need to reverse the declining trend in official development assistance (ODA) and to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for the industrialised countries. Foreign direct investment can also be of substantial value provided it occurs in a framework designed to ensure benefits for recipient countries and, in any case, should not be considered a substitute for ODA. The suggestion was further made to explore the potential of the 20:20 initiative for the social sector. In this context, the point was also made that there is a great deal of inequality between as well as within countries.

A number of other suggestions were made. Good governance, democracy and respect for human rights are crucial to establishing an enabling environment for social development and for poverty reduction. Similarly, it is important at national and international level to combat corruption, which negatively affects the availability of resources for social development. There is a need to strive for an ethical dimension to development and increase social awareness in order to achieve social development. Also underlined was the importance of achieving education for all through universal primary education as well as access to basic health care for all.

A further proposal was that the international community should develop social indicators for use in social programmes and the budget process at the national level. There was also a need for social impact analysis. Moreover, monitoring social progress necessitated specific tools.

There is an important gender perspective to social development and the point was made that gender issues should be mainstreamed. Particularly in areas of poverty and employment, women were at a disadvantage. The issue of their participation in politics was raised and some suggested that affirmative action would be needed to make progress towards a real partnership between men and women in politics.

In addition to the above proposals, the meeting also discussed what other new initiatives could be proposed to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the UNGA in June 2000. Having reviewed the draft text circulated to the Commission for Social development by its Bureau at its 37th session in February 1999 and in light of the report of the IPU Committee for Sustainable

Development, the following priority initiatives were highlighted in the discuission (they are listed under the ten commitments contained in the WSSD Programme of Action):

Commitment 1. An enabling environment for social development

- A necessary condition for effective social development is sustained improvement in the international environment for social development
- The centrality of effective, participatory governance including through free and regular elections and democratic national and international economic and social institutions, emphasising the role of parliament at all levels and civil society at large
- Preparation of basic socio-economic principles for use in responding to domestic and international crises that affect social development
- Principles on the social responsibilities of business
- Refocusing policies so that social goals and priorities become central and are in a sophisticated balance with economic priorities

Commitment 2. Eradication of poverty

- Strengthening national and international commitments to poverty reduction targets as the foundation for encouraging the adoption or review of national poverty reduction strategies
- A global poverty reduction target of halving absolute poverty, if possible by 2015
- Establishing, strengthening or improving social protection systems and their management

Commitment 3. Employment

- Strengthening commitment to the universal goal of full, productive, and appropriately and adequately remunerated and freely chosen employment as an essential underpinning for social development and achievement of the right to work
- Adoption of national employment growth strategies, including setting time-bound targets for employment growth, supported by national strategies including measures aimed at stimulating small and medium businesses; facilitating use of new technologies; encouraging rural development; improving the employment prospects of youth through active labour market policies such as direct employment creation, retraining, and redeployment assistance; ensuring gender equality in employment opportunities
- Particular attention could be focused on measures to increase productivity in the informal sector
- Establishing mechanisms to address effectively the shadow economy
- Strengthening commitment to social dialogue, including through commitment to freedom of association and to effective labour relations institutions

- The importance of universal adoption and national implementation of the core labour standards agreed by the Social Summit and reaffirmed by the International Labour Conference

Commitment 4. Social integration

- A necessary condition for social harmony is commitment to social justice which must include policies aimed at reducing extremes of wealth and poverty as well as at integrating groups with special neeeds

- Consideration of more effective ways of dealing with intra-national conflicts

Commitment 5. Equality and equity between women and men

- Making recommendations for means of gender mainstreaming may well be the most effective contribution that the Special Session can make to this Commitment

- Affirmative action as an instrument of social integration

Commitment 6. Universal and equitable access to quality education and health services

- Efforts to meet the target of achieving education for all through universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 should be stepped up even further.

- Consideration should be given to a new strategy for achieving the goal of access to basic health care for all. Such a strategy could include attention to major debilitating diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria

Commitment 7. Accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries

- A high priority for not only Africa but also the world is agreement on an international strategy for minimising the spread of HIV/AIDS, including benchmarks for stages of achievement

- Strengthening of South-South co-operation

Commitment 8. Ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals

- Structural adjustment programmes must be reviewed to ensure that social development goals and policies are included in all phases of macroeconomic strategy

- Means of increasing the transparency and accountability of the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization should be studied; a more open dialogue is needed, including with national parliaments

Commitment 9. Increase resources allocated to social development

- Protect the resources allocated for social development against the negative forces of globalisation
- Adequate, effective social policies require the availability of sufficient revenue within countries to pay for social services collected through a progressive tax structure and social insurance funds
- In a globalising world, tax interactions between countries must be reviewed to minimise tax competition between countries, to prevent tax evasion and to increase internationall co-operation on tax policy.
- The need to reverse the current decline in the proportion of ODA to GNP in each of the next five years with a view to reaching the agreed target of 0.7 percent of GNP
- Debt reduction is essential to creating conditions for implementation of the other commitments. One approach worth exploring would be the introduction of debt reduction for social development swaps

Commitment 10. Implementation and institutional reform

- Social impact assessments are a useful technique for evaluating national policy and programme initiatives and major projects
- Measures should be prepared to ensure that the objectives and policy approaches of the Social Summit are reflected effectively in the mandates, programmes and co-ordination arrangements of the United Nations, its funds and programmes, the Specialised Agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions
- The important role of Parliaments and legislative assemblies in furthering the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments should be emphasised
- National commissions for social development should be established to oversee implementation, complemented by parliamentary committees for social development.
- Consider development of minimum standards for social policy
- Standardisation of social development indicators taking into account different levels of development

3. Parliamentary follow-up to the meeting

At the end of their deliberations, the participants considered possible further follow-up action that could be taken by Parliaments nationally and at the international level.

At the national level, the meeting recognised that Parliaments themselves must be more effectively mobilised. For example, the core labour standards agreed by the Social Summit and reaffirmed by the International Labour Conference need to be translated into legislation. They must also ensure that the WSSD Programme of Action is integrated in the longer-term development plan together with adequate resources and political support. In this regard, it is important that Parliaments have the necessary financial resources, access to data and experts, ability to carry out independent research, office equipment and technology, and trained staff.

Moreover, it was suggested that each Parliament that does not already have a special mechanism – for example a parliamentary committee on social development – to constantly review and promote parliamentary action in support of the WSSD Programme of Action consider establishing one. It was also proposed that Parliament work towards the establishment of a national commission on social development and that this commission should be invited to submit an annual report on its activities to be debated in Parliament. Yet another proposal was for Parliaments to hold a special debate on social development to assess progress in implementing the WSSD Programme of Action as part of the preparations for the UNGA Special Session in June 2000.

At the international level, the IPU was encouraged to follow up the proposals put forward in the discussions. Particularly, it was suggested that the IPU arrange a special parliamentary meeting with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Both the report of the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development and the report of the present meeting should be circulated at the May 1999 session of the Preparatory Committee. The IPU could also encourage a parliamentary presence in the national delegations to the Preparatory Committee and, of course, also at the UNGA Special Session. Moreover, it was suggested that the IPU consider organising a parliamentary meeting in conjunction with the UNGA Special Session.

Appendix I

IInd TRIPARTITE MEETING ON FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (UN Headquarters, 30 and 31 March 1999)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Parliamentary representatives

- Dr. Refaat Eremesy, MP, Egypt
- Dr. P. Upendra, MP, India (Chairman of the IInd Tripartite Meeting)
- Mrs. Sangaré Oumou Ba, Vice-President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Mali
- Dr. Luis Campos Baca, MP, Chairman of the Committee on Environment and Amazona, Peru
- Mr. V. Lisitchkin, MP, Chairman of the Committee on Labour and Social Policy, Russian Federation
- Mr. Roman Jakic, MP, Republic of Slovenia
- Congressman Barney Frank, United States Congress
- Mr. Daniel McGlinchey, Office of Congressman Frank
- Ms. Jane Chikwata, MP, Deputy Minister of Community Development and Social Services, Zambia

Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in New York

- Mrs. Dalila Samah, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Algeria
- Dr. Patricia Flor, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Germany
- Mr. Gautam Mukhopadhaya, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of India
- H.E. Mr. Bagher Asadi, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- H.E. Mr. Ion Gorita, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Romania
- Mr. Andrei A. Nikiforov, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation

Representatives of inter-governmental organisations

- **United National Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**
  Mr. John Langmore, Director for Social Policy and Development
  Ms. Gloria Kan, Chief, Intergovernmental Policy Branch
- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**
  Mr. G. Shabbir Cheema, Director, Management Development and Governance Division
  Ms. Randi Davis, Adviser, Management Development and Governance Division
- **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**
  Mrs. Nina Sibal, Director of the New York Liaison Office
  Ms. Claudia Valencia, Liaison Officer, New York Office
- **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)**
  Mr. Krishna Ghimire, Project Officer
- **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**
  Mr. Garth Howell, Officer-in-charge of the ILO New York Liaison Office
  Ms. Alina Pastiu, Associate, ILO New York Liaison Office
- **World Bank**
  Mr. Alfredo Sfeir-Youmis, Special Representative to the UN
- **IPU**
  Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General
  Mr. Santiago Romero-Perez, Diretor of the Liaison Office with the UN, New York

Appendix II

IMPLEMENTING WSSD COMMITMENTS: A REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIONS

Analysis of replies to the IPU questionnaire on parliamentary action to implement the WSSD outcome prepared for the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development by Krishna Ghimire of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

◆ Parliamentary action to implement the WSSD agenda

According to the survey results, the WSSD Declaration and Programme of Action were "presented and endorsed" by a small number of parliaments (e.g. Denmark, Finland), and a few sought to incorporate them in their development plans (e.g. Ethiopia). For the most part, the Copenhagen commitments were "introduced" in parliament, and some discussions took place. In the preparation of laws, adaptation of annual budgets, plenary debates and parliamentary hearings, questioning and motions, the commitments made at the WSSD were frequently considered. Some of these parliamentary actions reflecting the Social Summit's commitments are described below.

Parliamentary debates and enactment of relevant laws. National parliaments reported the enactment of laws on social development issues as their primary means of implementing the WSSD commitments. In the industrialised countries, where many laws on social questions already exist, attention was directed toward defining more accurately both the concept and context of poverty, unemployment and exclusion. Denmark, France, Sweden, Canada and Japan have also promulgated laws involving the rights of women, children, disabled persons, immigrant populations, etc. France, for instance, has enacted laws to address urban exclusion and insecurity, illegal immigrants and the legal recognition of homosexuality; it has further sought to reduce weekly working hours to create new employment.

In Eastern Europe, Belarus, Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia have passed laws seeking to provide assistance to the jobless, as well as integrating young people and disabled persons in the labour market. They have also taken legal steps to provide new safety nets for people affected by the abandonment of the previous systems of social provisioning. Health-care and pension schemes in particular have been given high priority.

Unemployment has remained a serious concern in all developing countries. South Africa, for example, passed an Employment Equity Bill in 1995 aimed at changing the previously dominant discriminatory labour relations in recruitment, promotion, salaries, etc. Costa Rica has adopted laws on public employment, social security and health in the construction sector, the promotion of employment and protection against unemployment. In Gabon, detailed policy measures on investment have been developed to promote employment. India has enacted the Worker Compensation and Bonus Amendment Acts. In Niger, a law has been passed on new economic and investment priorities. Zambia has enacted laws encouraging small enterprises and more flexible labour relations.

Education has also received attention. In Costa Rica, laws on the use of radio and television as means for educational development have been adopted. Niger has passed a law on the orientation of the educational system. Turkey has promulgated a law on compulsory education to eight years and on the improvement of vocational education.

Developing countries answering the questionnaire also cite the special attention given to women and children's rights. For example, Costa Rica has adopted laws on women's social equality, assistance to women living in poverty and domestic violence. South Africa has introduced a Gender Management System to ensure gender equality in socio-economic spheres. India has directed its Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) toward the empowerment of women and children and passed legislation on maternity benefits. Viet Nam has adopted a law stipulating women's equal rights to employment and professional training and equal salaries. The Philippines adopted the child and youth welfare code, street children programme, and women in especially difficult circumstances programme. In Namibia, a national gender policy was adopted in 1997. The Republic of Korea has also adopted an act favouring women's development and child welfare. Many countries have introduced reforms and new laws on the provision of health-care. Niger, Senegal, South Africa and Gabon have elaborated detailed health policies and action programmes. Different laws were also passed for the well-being of disabled and aged persons in a number of countries (including Zambia and India).

Budgetary provisions. Most parliaments have acknowledged the need to direct resources toward social development goals, especially in areas such as education and health-care. Costa Rica has revised its Constitution to guarantee not less than 6 per cent of its GDP for education. South Africa allocated as much as 6.5 per cent of its GDP to the education sector in 1997/98. Egypt and Turkey have also increased their education budgets.

A number of countries have sought to create social safety nets against unemployment and other precarious situations. Poland, the former Yougoslav Republic of Macedonia and Slovenia have increased social expenditure to alleviate the negative impacts of economic restructuring. The Republic of Korea has created special funds for people suffering from the recent economic difficulties. Viet Nam has created an employment fund. Gabon has created social solidarity funds to fight against poverty and to help integrate unemployed people into the waged labour market. Egypt has established a social fund to protect workers against the negative impacts of privatisation. Senegal has been studying the establishment of a national fund for employment beginning in 1999. Jordan has set the target of securing a minimum income of 140 JD for families with seven members. India has seen an increase in social services and rural development from 1.47 per cent of GDP in 1990/91 to 1.75 per cent in 1997/98.

In the industrialised countries, Canada has increased the budget for child benefits and student scholarships. It has also reallocated 25 per cent of its overseas development assistance (ODA) to meeting basic human needs in poorer countries. Denmark has allocated 1 per cent of its GDP to ODA, especially to the least developed countries. Japan has expanded its foreign aid for social development, including the environment, population, gender and AIDS, surpassing the ODA's 20 per cent commitment for the social sector since 1993.

Establishment of special institutions. Several countries have created commissions or committees within their parliaments to focus on social development issues, including those referred to in the WSSD commitments. Japan has established a Liaison Meeting consisting of 23 relevant ministries and agencies aimed at studying and implementing the commitments made at the WSSD. Niger has set up a commission on social and cultural affairs and plans to establish an independent ministry on national solidarity. According to Mali's questionnaire responses, the second term of the present President was exclusively aimed at fighting poverty. Various parliamentary committees have been set up in Zambia to consider the Summit's commitments and the necessary policy measures. In

Jordan, a high-level ministerial committee has been established to address social issues and, in particular, the government's goal of eradicating abject poverty by the year 2000. India has appointed a ministerial committee on empowerment of women. In Thailand, the National Economic and Social Development Board has been appointed as a national focal point on WSSD commitments.

Special events. A few countries have organised special events on social development. The Belarus Parliament held three public hearings on social issues, including public education and human rights, between 1997-1998. South Africa conducted a national workshop in May 1998 to review the constraints, obstacles and possible solutions for social development in the country. In Mali, October is "solidarity month" during which different activities are organised (especially by NGOs) to offer help to the most marginalised population groups. In France, 20 November is legally recognised as national "Children's Day".

Data collection and studies. Several parliaments have sought to gather information on specific problems faced by the population or to help them to propose concrete policy measures. Gabon and Togo (with the World Bank and UNDP respectively) have carried out studies to evaluate absolute poverty in their countries. Niger has sought to elaborate a detailed policy for social development and has also been collaborating with UNICEF in a study on possibilities for mobilising internal resources to meet the goal of 20 per cent investment in the social sector. The Belgian Commission on Social Affairs produced a report on unemployment and social exclusion in 1997. The German Parliament has commissioned a study to assess the social welfare effects of demographic changes for different age groups. Sweden has been helping 12 countries in Africa and six in Asia to produce gender-disaggregated statistics and basic data on living conditions. Denmark is also providing technical assistance to Uganda to develop statistical capacity for a better assessment of the objectives and problems of social development. Similarly, Switzerland has expressed interest in conducting pilot studies on the implementation of 20:20 initiatives at the country level in Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Bolivia.

Wider consultation. A number of parliaments have engaged in wider interaction with the academic community, NGOs, welfare institutions, regional and national authorities, and the international community. Public hearings and the celebration of the types of special events referred to above are channels for wider discussion and exchange. In Canada, parliamentary actions have frequently involved wide-ranging consultations with the provinces and civil society organisations. In Switzerland, the parliament and the government have made an effort to raise public awareness on such major social questions as debt, inequality and sustainable development with an active participation of the NGO sector. Egypt has sought to mobilise NGOs to provide assistance to the poorer groups in society. Niger has also encouraged NGOs and the voluntary sector to better serve the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups. The Parliament of Mali has interacted with national NGOs, for example, in the context of celebrations to mark Solidarity Month in October. South Africa has conducted extensive consultative processes involving the public, NGOs and expert advisers through public hearings, workshops and committee debates on the finalisation of various government policies on employment, poverty, education, health and housing. The Philippines has also reported that, during the period 1995-98 there has been greater collaboration among the central government, local government units, NGOs, people's organizations, the private sector and the local communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the various social development projects.

◆ **Elaboration of time-bound national strategies**

At the Summit, it was agreed that countries should attempt to set target dates for eliminating absolute poverty and for addressing other pressing social development questions. National parliaments have played an important role in focusing government efforts at achieving poverty alleviation by specified dates, for instance, in their five-year or longer term development plans and strategies. Sectoral initiatives (education, health, gender) have also incorporated specific time frames. Some of these development initiatives specifically incorporate the WSSD agenda items. Ethiopia, for example, has included the principal recommendations of the Summit in its current Five-Year Plan, with food self-sufficiency being the principal short-term aim. Namibia also developed a long-term food security and nutrition policy following the Social Summit. In 1997, Senegal elaborated a long-term employment policy. Similarly, Costa Rica and Jordan have elaborated specific programmes to eradicate absolute poverty by the years 2000 and 2001, respectively. India, too, has developed a national programme aimed at generating greater productive employment between 1997 and 2002. Belarus has elaborated a national strategy for sustainable development (1996-2000), while Poland designed a programme to tackle unemployment by 2000. Bulgaria implemented the "Programme 2001" - a medium-term economic strategy to overcome the crisis in the country, with legislative initiatives to reform the public sector and provide social protection to ease the burden of the transitional period. Thailand has included the Summit's commitments in its Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001). The Philippines developed a National Development Plan: 1999-2004 with the goal of raising the quality of life of the citizens. The Republic of Korea has prepared a national plan for the welfare of the disabled until the year 2000, and also intends to provide training and education to 30,000 foreign workers by 2010. Gabon has set 2005 as its target year to reduce poverty substantially. Slovenia has developed a strategy on the development of the job market during 1999-2006. Egypt and the former Republic of Macedonia have developed long-term national development strategies to tackle poverty and unemployment issues, extending until 2016/17 and 2020 respectively.

◆ **Tangible results**

Have the actions taken by these countries led to any concrete results in terms of reducing poverty, increasing productive employment and strengthening social solidarity? Very few of the replies provide direct answers to this question. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Russian Federation acknowledge limited tangible results; Belarus mentions the decline in the quality of health-care; and the Slovak Republic cites rising unemployment. Israel reports that the incidence of poverty has risen in recent years. Developed countries, such as Canada, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France and Finland, also report few or no tangible results. Some developing countries cite their enactment of laws and budgetary provisions as "measurable results". Among the developing countries citing tangible results, Costa Rica, for instance, states the decline in unemployment in rural areas, as well as falling female unemployment in general. Viet Nam mentions that it created 1.3 million jobs in 1998 through the recently established Employment Creation Fund and claims to have cut the number of extremely poor households by 15.7 per cent in 1998. The Philippines states that poverty has decreased from 35.5 per cent in 1994 to 32.1 per cent in 1997. Turkey mentions a reduction in the unemployment rate from 6.9 per cent in 1995 to 6.4 per cent in 1998, and an increase in the proportion of the population covered by social security from 78.6 per cent in 1995 to 85.3 per cent in 1998.

◆ **Constraints and obstacles**

Among the industrialised countries, Finland, France, Denmark, Germany and Belgium did not respond. Canada cites the complexity of its federal-provincial relations, explaining that many of the WSSD commitments fall between federal and provincial jurisdiction and that independent actions are complicated at both levels. Federal transfers of resources to the provinces for health, education and welfare programmes have been cut. Sweden, too, mentions that recent economic recession forced the country to reduce development aid from 1 per cent of GDP in 1992/93 to 0.7 per cent since 1996.

The Eastern European countries answering the questionnaire cite the shortage of financial resources as being the primary constraint in implementing WSSD commitments. Economic and financial crises, as well as frequent government changes affecting policy-making in the Russian Federation have limited the effectiveness of programmes aimed at providing pensions, wages and welfare payments. Belarus cites inflation, lingering health hazards and other social costs related to the Chernobyl accident. Poland identifies labour unrest, underdevelopment of rural areas and the widening gap between rich and poor as the main obstacles to social development in the country. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia states its specific problems of being a landlocked country, lack of international political recognition and the organisation of its economy around the Yugoslav economy and market. Slovenia points out the increase in unemployment and budget cuts in health, pension and social insurance that have resulted from the shifts to a market-based economy. Similar problems are raised by the Slovak Republic. A low level of economic development, the absence of a consolidated national poverty eradication strategy and neglect of human and minority rights are suggested as being the chief problem areas for Hungary.

Developing countries have identified a wide range of obstacles and constraints to the implementation of the Summit's commitments. India, the Philippines, Israel, Jordan, Mali, Niger, and Togo mention insufficient financial resources and budgetary pressure as key obstacles. Some African countries, such as Zambia, Tunisia and Mali, consider foreign debt to be the major constraint. Niger points out the reticence on the part of donors to cancel debt or convert it to finance development plans; furthermore, it asserts that influential development partners lack interest in supporting the social sector. Viet Nam and the Philippines note that the region's recent financial crisis has led to cuts in external investment in the country. Tunisia cites a reduction in aid by major donor countries as a prominent handicap. Structural adjustment, economic recession and privatisation are mentioned by Gabon, Jordan and Niger. Apart from financial resources, Ethiopia notes the scarcity of skilled manpower, capital and experience as obstacles, while Turkey points out the lack of statistical data and adequate indicators. Zambia and Niger also view the unfavourable environment (e.g., drought, desertification) and famine as critical problems. These two countries, as well as India, consider high population growth rates and rural-to-urban migration additional difficulties. Namibia views food insecurity as a major social development challenge in the country; highly unequal income distribution is also cited (10 per cent of the population controls more than 80 per cent of the country's resources). Togo perceives the slow progress in decentralisation and the lack of active popular participation in social development projects as important pitfalls. Other constraints mentioned by different countries include gender, caste and tribal disparities, internal and regional political instability and overlapping of social development initiatives between government institutions.

◆ **Prospects for further action by parliaments**

Many replies suggest that parliaments could adopt a more prominent role in assisting with the implementation of the commitments made at the Summit. Among the industrialised countries, Canada perceives a need to create greater opportunities for the public to make inputs in policy-making processes, and the political parties in particular should contribute to increasing the representation of vulnerable groups (e.g., women, disabled persons, aboriginal peoples, etc.) in the House of Commons. Switzerland has also emphasised the need to increase public interest in the major social issues included in the WSSD commitments.

In responses from Eastern European countries, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia suggests that the Assembly could conduct a wider discussion of the Summit's commitments by organising public debates and studies on the relevant issues. The Russian Federation states that the Constitution should be amended to allow for a more efficient role of the Federal Assembly in social policy-making. Parliament would thus increase its influence over the Executive and would have more effective control over the implementation of programmes and measures. The Slovak Republic suggests that issues relating to social development should be discussed in the national parliament and not only in committee.

Jordan, Mali, Namibia and South Africa suggest the need to establish a research unit to improve the quality of the information available to parliament. Niger and Togo suggest setting up parliamentary committees to monitor implementation of the commitments. Niger also proposes an interregional committee of parliaments to deal with the Summit's agenda. According to Ethiopia, parliaments should exchange experiences and increase co-operation. India believes that various mechanisms of parliamentary scrutiny need to be strengthened to make parliament more administratively accountable. Furthermore, national parliaments should study the obstacles they identified in the questionnaire and allocate sufficient funds for population control programmes and other aspects of social development. Namibia believes that members of parliament should increase their contact with "technocrats" to improve the level of information. MPs' visits to project sites would also be useful. Egypt, too, points out that MPs are often not able to identify the priority issues that need to be addressed. Mali and Zambia suggest that proper functioning of their parliaments requires better equipment, in terms of not only technical means (e.g. computers) but also skilled manpower.

Many countries' questionnaire responses point out the lack of co-ordination between social and economic goals and policies. They call for a reorganisation and restructuring of government agencies and parliamentary structures to fulfil their role as promoters of social development. For instance, Niger gives priority to the reorganisation of structures working to promote social development, and urges greater co-ordination between social development and national planning. Turkey calls for the restructuring of the government to better integrate social and economic issues in policy making. The Republic of Korea points out the need for long-term plans to consider both economic growth and social development. Thailand recommends closer co-operation between national legislative and executive branches. The Philippines considers that, due to different budgetary priorities between the Executive and the Parliament, transparency in budget issues and preliminary budget consultations should be promoted. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia calls for reinforcement and integration of general development, and sectoral strategies and plans.

◆ Parliamentary proposals for international action

Diverse proposals have been made in terms of the further international initiatives required, especially in the context of the planned Special Session of the UN General Assembly ("Copenhagen Plus Five"). This Session will take place in June 2000 (five years after the Copenhagen Summit) to assess progress in the implementation of the WSSD commitments. Canada is planning to conduct a five-year review of its achievements, and Denmark is organising a series of seminars to pursue the international dialogue on implementation of Summit commitments. The results and recommendations of the review process will be presented at Copenhagen Plus Five. Belarus is also planning to hold an international conference in 1999 to discuss, among other things, issues related to follow-up of the WSSD commitments.

According to Egypt, Jordan, Mali, Niger and Zambia, a critical issue that needs to be urgently dealt with at the international level is the cancellation of developing countries' foreign debt. Zambia also cites the need to find ways to reduce the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes on the lives of people in poor countries. Niger recommends that discussion of the 20:20 initiative should continue, as should the organisation of round tables with donors to redirect funds towards the social sector. The Republic of Korea exhorts governments and parliaments to engage in a global partnership to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of globalisation. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia calls for more substantial financial aid and technical support as well as regional co-operation; it also urges international financial organisations to incorporate social goals and instruments in their forms of support to developing countries. The Russian Federation also suggests that there should be an increase in international humanitarian aid. The Philippines considers that it is necessary to establish a more refined monitoring system and to embark in further research on such issues as external debt, regional peace and stability, human rights, drug and human trafficking, and the improvement of bilateral relations.

Most countries believe that it is important to increase international co-operation in one way or another. Costa Rica pleads for increased technical co-operation. Turkey calls for the inclusion of developing countries in the information superhighways, as well as examination of the positive and negative effects of the expansion in communication and information technologies. Niger states that improved co-ordination at the regional and sub-regional levels is indispensable to fight poverty. Egypt calls for the exchange of experiences among parliaments. Thailand intends to propose a parliamentary meeting prior to Copenhagen Plus Five to discuss relevant issues and make specific suggestions to the international community.